THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI NITISH KUMAR): (a) No, Sir. (b)

Does not arise.

Effect of drought on rabi sowing

*69. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD:
DR.T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether a depressive Kharif season due to drought and low soil moisture has affected rabi sowing in different parts of the country;

(b) if so, whether sowing so far of rabi wheat, coarse cereals, pulses and oilseeds has shown shortfall over the last year;

(c) if so, to what extent there has been a shortfall of rabi crop during the current season; and

(d) the steps Government propose to take to meet the situtation?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI AJIT SINGH): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The area sown during Rabi season this year is about 3.5 million hectares less than the area sown last year. The decrease in area coverage under rice, wheat, coarse cereals, pulses and oilseeds during Rabi season this year over the last year is about 1.0 million hectares, 1.3 million hectares, 0.5 million hectares, 0.6 million hectares 0.1 million hectare respectively.

(c) Rabi harvest is yet to take place. However, according to the second advance estimates of production for 2002-03 as on February 10, 2003, the total Rabi foodgrains production is likely to be 92.91 million tones which is lower by 7.56 million tones or 7.5% as compared to last year's Rabi foodgrains production. Oilseeds production during the Rabi season 2002-03 is likely to be 6.99 million tonnes which is 0.58 million tonnes or 7.7% less than the production of Rabi oilseeds last year.

(d) According to the second advance estimates, the total production of foodgrains during 2002-03 is expected to be 183.17 million tonnes and the total production of oilseeds is expected to be 15.44 million tones. As the stock position of foodgrains in the country is much above the buffer norm, there is no crisis. This is also borne out by the fact that the wholesale price index (1993-94=100) in respect of foodgrains increased

only marginally by 0.3% over the month ended 1 st February, 2003. However, in order to enable the farmers to achieve higher level of production and productivity a number of initiatives have been taken by the Government. Taking into account the increase in input cost caused by drought, the Government have announced on-time Special Drought Relief varying from Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 per quintal for the Rabi crops. Besides, Minimum Support Price has been increased by Rs. 20 per quintal each for Gram and Masur, and by Rs. 30 per quintal for Rapeseed/Mustard. Other measures include promotion of watershed development, development and promotion of new technology etc. As regards oilseeds, in addition to the measures aimed at promoting production and productivity, import of edible oils is allowed freely to bridge the gap between domestic production availability.

Import duty on cotton

*73. SHRI A. VIJAYA RAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the prices of cotton reached all time low during 2001;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the import of cotton had increased in the country steeply;

(c) if so, whether Government evaluated the impact of the increased import on the cotton producing areas;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) whether Government have taken steps to increase import duty on cotton on the permissible level in accordance with the WTO conditions;

(f) if so, the details thereof; and

(g) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI AJIT SINGH): (a) The prices of cotton during the peak months of 2001 -02 season were low as compared to prices during the corresponding period of last season. However, the annual average prices in certain years that is 1990-91, 1991 -92,1992-93 and 1993-94 were lower than the annual average prices of 2001-02.